
POMPEO'S VISIT TO BRUSSELS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A UNIFIED IRAN STRATEGY

- 03.09.2019

EurActiv (3 September 2019)

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeos two-day visit to Brussels (2 and 3 September) is an excellent opportunity to address several important issues for the cross-Atlantic relations and have a unified strategy in addressing them as Europe is going to have a new leadership, Giulio Terzi writes.

Giulio Terzi, a former foreign minister of Italy, is a member of United Against Nuclear Irans Advisory Board.

American officials affirmed their interest in doing so just ahead of Pompeos visit. Ambassador Gordon Sondland was quoted as saying, I essentially want to try to reset the relationship. And one hopes that European officials would see the current situation in the same way. The coming days will surely reveal the extent of their commitment to working with the US in order to address mutual challenges and threats. One of the main challenges is how to deal with the Iranian regime and its bellicose behavior.

Iran has shown increasing aggression toward commercial shipping in the region, as evidenced by its seizure of a British-flagged vessel in mid-July. The United Kingdom responded appropriately by directing its warships in the region to shadow such vessels for the foreseeable future. But Europe has seemed hesitant to recognize the Iranian threat as extending to them.

The EU may be able to fool itself into believing that the naval activities of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have been directed only against the US and Britain, even though seized and damaged tankers have born the flags of various countries including Norway and Japan. But no such self-deception can be justified when it comes to the threat of terrorism originating in or backed by Tehran.

In 2018 alone, at least half a dozen bomb plots and planned assassinations were disrupted by Western authorities. The prospective targets were by no means limited to those Western entities that promoted maximum pressure or enforced economic sanctions on the Islamic Republic. Although two Iranian operatives were indicted for spying on opposition activists and other would-be targets in the United States, similar operations were uncovered as far away as Albania, where the pro-democracy Peoples Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK) recently established a residence for 3,000 members who had been relocated from Iraq and spared from recurring attacks by Tehrans militant proxies.

And in what may be the single most significant example of Iranian terrorism from last year, a couple living in Belgium was arrested as they were attempting to cross the border into France in

possession of several hundred grams of high-explosive. Acting under the direction of a high-ranking Iranian diplomat, these aspiring terrorists intended to set off their bomb just outside Paris, at the annual gathering of the MEK-led coalition, the National Council of Resistance of Iran.

That event is typically attended by a politically diverse body of supporters from Western and international policy circles, alongside tens of thousands of Iranian expatriates. (I was attending the event with a major cross-party delegation from Italy).

The Vienna-based Iranian diplomat, Assadollah Assadi, was arrested in Germany (where he did not have diplomatic immunity) based on a European arrest warrant. According to spokesman for the Belgian federal prosecutor the would-be terrorists had picked up the explosive in Luxembourg from the Iranian diplomat who happened to be a senior member of the Iranian intelligence service. After three months of obstruction by Tehran, Germany extradited Assadi to Belgium in October, who is awaiting trial with three of his agents involved in the plot that was established was decided at the highest levels in Tehran.

Had the plot been successful, it would have not only taken place on European soil but would have almost certainly claimed European lives. If one is aware of this incident, one cannot deny that the Iranian threat to the international community is genuine, severe, and far-reaching.

To be more precise, no one can deny this conclusion in good faith. But that wont necessarily stop any given policymaker from denying it anyway. In advance of Irans Foreign Minister visiting Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron reportedly told his security chiefs to keep silent about last years terror plot. Now, in the wake of visits to Europe by the top diplomats from both Iran and the US, it is up to the incoming EU leadership to determine whose attitude toward Iran carries more weight: those who are explicitly covering up its crimes, or those who aspire to hold it to account.

The answer to this question will yield both short and long-term consequences. In the first place, it may determine whether the diplomat-terrorist who masterminded last years Paris bomb plot is actually punished in accordance with the charges he is now facing in Belgium. And the message of his prosecution may in turn set the stage for a proper, multilateral response to further Iranian terrorism, at a time when the regime is threatening Western entities like the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, subjecting them to sanctions that might better be understood as fatwas.

Speaking more broadly, decisions in the coming days may determine the future of US-EU relations. The Europeans need to recognize the need for confronting Iranian threats and guaranteeing that the regime faces consequences for criminal behavior.

Kaynak/Source: